WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for shipping goods, wherein the method comprises:

5   receiving a request to ship an item from an origination to a final destination;

    searching a database for a most inexpensive routing, wherein the most inexpensive routing includes using two or more different shipping companies and one or more intermediate destinations;

    generating a data file comprising at least the following:

10   intermediate destination information, and

       final destination information; and

    storing the data file in a memory device that accompanies the item.

2. The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the memory device is configured to allow
15   the data file to be updated at one or more of the intermediate destinations.

3. The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising packing the item in a container for shipping, wherein the container is configured to fit with multiple other containers in a carrier.

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4. The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising forwarding copies of at least a portion of the data file via a network to one or more of the parties involved in the shipping, wherein the parties include at least an originator of the request to ship the item, a recipient of the item at the final destination, and two or more shipping
25   companies.

5. The method as recited in claim 4, further comprising forwarding copies of the data file via the network to one or more predetermined email addresses.

6. The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising forwarding a copy of the data file via a network to a central server.

7. The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising shipping the item using the least
5   expensive routing.

8. The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising:

packing the item in a container;

inserting the container in a first carrier with a first set of additional containers bound for a
10   first of the one or more intermediate destinations; and

shipping the first carrier to the first intermediate destination.

9. The method as recited in claim 8, further comprising:

receiving the carrier at the first intermediate destination;

15   removing the container from the carrier;

inserting the container into a different carrier with a second set of additional containers
bound for a second intermediate destination or the final destination; and

shipping the second carrier to the second intermediate destination or the final destination.

20   10. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the data file further comprises contact
information for one or more shipping companies that will handle the item.

11. The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising storing the data file on a server
connected to a network, wherein the server provides access to the data file via the
25   network.

12. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the data file further comprises item weight
information.

13. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the data file further comprises item handling information.

14. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the data file further comprises item content information.

15. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the data file further comprises payment information.

16. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the data file further includes one or more digital images of the item before, during, or after shipping.

17. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the data file further includes one or more digital images of the item showing the physical condition of the item upon receipt at one or more intermediate destinations.

18. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the memory device further comprises a temperature sensor, wherein the temperature sensor is configured to periodically measure and store temperature readings in the data file.

19. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the memory device further comprises a humidity sensor, wherein the physical humidity sensor is configured to periodically measure and store humidity readings in the data file.

20. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the memory device further comprises an environmental sensor, wherein the environmental sensor is configured to periodically measure and store in the data file information about one or more environmental factors that the item experiences during shipment.

21. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the memory device further comprises a vibration sensor, wherein the vibration sensor is configured to record any vibrations greater than a preprogrammed threshold in the data file.

5   22. The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the memory device is coupled to a wireless communications device.

23. The method as recited in claim 2, further comprising:

detecting one or more obstacles to on-time delivery of the item, searching the database

10   for a new least expensive routing that avoids the obstacles; and

updating the data file to reflect the new least expensive routing.

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24. A method for shipping goods, wherein the method comprises:

receiving a request to ship an item from an origination to a final destination;

soliciting quotations for shipping the item by transmitting a request for quotation via a

        network;

20   receiving responses to the request for quotation via the network;

selecting a shipping route for the item based on the responses, wherein the shipping route

        comprises one or more intermediate destinations;

confirming the selected shipping route via the network;

generating a data file comprising at least the following:

25   a unique item identifier,

        origination information,

        intermediate destination information, and

        final destination information; and

storing the data file in a memory device that accompanies the item, wherein the memory device is configured to allow the data file to be updated at one or more of the intermediate destinations.

5   25. The method as recited in claim 24, further comprising forwarding copies of at least a portion of the data file via the network to one or more of the parties involved in the shipping, wherein the parties include at least an originator of the request to ship the item, a recipient of the item at the final destination, and two or more shipping companies.

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26. The method as recited in claim 24, further comprising forwarding copies of the data file via the network to one or more predetermined email addresses.

27. The method as recited in claim 24, further comprising forwarding a copy of the data

15   file via the network to a central server.

28. The method as recited in claim 27, further comprising updating the data file on the central server to reflect the item's arrival at one or more of the intermediate destinations.

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29. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the data file further comprises contact information for one or more shipping companies that will handle the item.

30. The method as recited in claim 24, further comprising storing the data file on a server

25   connected to the network, wherein the server provides access to the data file via the network.

31. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the data file further comprises item weight information.

32. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the data file further comprises item handling information.

33. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the data file further comprises item content information.

34. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the data file further comprises payment information.

35. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the data file further includes one or more digital images of the item before shipping.

36. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the data file further includes one or more digital images of the item showing the physical condition of the item upon receipt at one or more intermediate destinations.

37. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the memory device further comprises a temperature sensor, wherein the temperature sensor is configured to periodically measure and store temperature readings in the data file.

38. he method as recited in claim 24, wherein the memory device further comprises a humidity sensor, wherein the physical humidity sensor is configured to periodically measure and store humidity readings in the data file.

39. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the memory device further comprises an environmental sensor, wherein the environmental sensor is configured to measure and store in the data file information about one or more environmental conditions

experienced by the item during shipment that exceed one or more predetermined thresholds.

40. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the memory device further comprises a vibration sensor, wherein the vibration sensor is configured to record any vibrations greater than a preprogrammed threshold in the data file.

41. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the memory device is a flash memory device.

42. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the memory device is a CD-RW.

43. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the memory device is coupled to a wireless communications device.

44. The method as recited in claim 24, wherein the responses include price information and delivery time information.

45. The method as recited in claim 24, further comprising:
detecting one or more obstacles to on-time delivery of the item, soliciting new quotations for shipping the item from one of the intermediate locations to the final destination by transmitting a supplemental request for quotation via the network; receiving additional responses to the supplemental request for quotation via the network; selecting an alternate shipping route for the item based on the additional responses; and confirming the selected alternate shipping route via the network.

46. The method as recited in claim 45, wherein the obstacles include travel advisories for one or more of the intermediate locations.

47. The method as recited in claim 45, wherein the obstacles include shipping backlogs.

48. The method as recited in claim 45, further comprising updating the data file to reflect the selected alternate shipping routing.

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49. The method as recited in claim 24, further comprising updating the data file on the server to reflect the item's arrival at the final destination.

50. A computer program embodied on a computer-readable medium, wherein the
10   computer program is configured to:

receive a shipping request for an item to be shipped from an origination to a final destination;

search a database of shipping information;

selecting a shipping route for the item based on the responses, wherein the shipping route
15   comprises one or more intermediate destinations and uses two or more different shipping companies;

confirm the selected shipping route via a network;

generate a data file comprising at least the following:

            a unique item identifier,

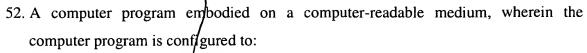20   origination information,

            intermediate destination information, and

            final destination information; and

store the data file in a memory device that accompanies the item, wherein the memory device is configured to allow the data file to be updated at one or more of the
25   intermediate destinations.

51. The computer program of claim 50, further comprising maintaining and updating the database by sending requests for quotes using the network.

52. A computer program embodied on a computer-readable medium, wherein the
   computer program is configured to:

   search a database of shipping information for an item to be shipped from an origination to
   a final destination;

5 select a shipping route for the item based on data from the database search, wherein the
   shipping route comprises one or more intermediate destinations;

   generating a data file comprising at least the following:
   a unique item identifier,
   intermediate destination information, and
10 final destination information; and

   storing the data file in a storage device that accompanies the item, wherein the storage
   device is configured to allow the data file to be updated at each intermediate destination.